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ABSTRACT

Analysis of the relationship between language and ethics can provide insight into social institutions, social discourse, and social action. Further, synthesis of language and social education can aid educators as they develop curriculum which deals with communication and reasoning in social decision making. Ethics is interpreted to include the moral principles of a society and rules which dictate modes of conduct. Language is interpreted primarily as a social enterprise which locks individuals into a certain view of reality. Consequently, speech, action, and social institutions must be considered in light of specific reasoning patterns and moral persuasions. Curriculum dealing with social action should emphasize cultural perspectives of time and place as well as the aesthetic balance of nature and culture which is necessary for human existance. Areas of study throughout the K-12 sequence should include history, social sciences, ethics, aesthetics, logic, and philosophic thinking processes. In addition, students should be involved in community projects and enrichment activities with institutions of high learning. Social education will improve if social studies educators help students understand the human structures of reasoning and their linguistic and ethical underpinnings. (DB)

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USING LINGUISTIC STRUCTURES AS A FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL EDUCATION*

by

H. Michael Hartoonian

> Facts are always examined in light of some theory and therefore cannot be disentangled from philosophy. Vygotsky

Winston Churchill once suggested that first we shape our dwellings, and then our dwellings shape us. One can make the argument that our language also shapes us...who we are and how we see the world. While it ma be the case that thought and speech have different genetic roots (Vygotsky, 1974) it is clear that language and thought are mutually interactive, that is, they reinforce each other. What is important to consider here, however, is that language (and that part of language we call external speech) is primarily a social enterprise and as such carries with it ethical implications. Language, as the dwelling place for our mind, shapes the ethical framework of our communities.

Linguistic models* lock us into a certain mental space and this space becomes, to a large degree, reality or what might be called the scope and sequence of our social discourse, complete with moral persuasions.

Reality rests upon two foundations that are related, radically different, and powerful in their pervasiveness. In one the base is provided by symbolic processes, the best example of which, of course, is language. The other base is provided by the adaptation of people to their physical, biotic and social environments through the use of organizational and technical developments. The former asserts that words we use shape ideas and guide our mental activities. Words

*See Appendix A

are not simply the instruments for voicing ideas, but the intellectual framework from which thought cannot long escape. In other words, language is an instrument which we use to dissect or classify environments. These sets (our present reality), in turn, form a conceptual framework for discovering new realities. As stated above, speech and thought are different concepts, but they meet and join; separate, and join again throughout life, and must be viewed together, if we intend to study the social world. The world presents an array of impressions which we organize in our minds, and communicate via our linguistic system. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts and theories and place importance upon these categories largely because we are part of the society that agrees to organize it in this way. The agreement holds throughout our linguistic society and is codified in the way we talk. The agreement is unstated, implicit and pervasive, but its terms are absolutely mandatory...that is, if we want to communicate we must accept the organizations and classifications scheme that has social agreement and, I might add, the force of (any) law. This foundation of reality is significant for educators, for it means that no individual is free to describe phenomena with objective impartiality, but must stay within certain frameworks.

The latter reality foundation, that of organizational and technical developments, calls attention to another dwelling for the human mind and spirit. Out of this base stem the institutional standards that form our social deep structure which accounts for such phenomena as economic functionalism and bureaucracy. It posits, relative to formal education, that teacher (school) action is a function of institutional ideology; that school environment is a function of the technological development of the larger society; and that the knowledge which each student acquires is a function of the community's view of how the distribution of culture should be made.

Together language and organization/technical developments provide the framework for our perceptions. And in a sense this framework is hidden, but perhaps it is hidden only because it is so obvious...we look by it with such ease...to our own realities.

While language in conjunction with organizational and technical developments buttresses our sense of reality, the concern here is with the ethical relationships between these phenomena and social discourse and/or social action.

Why should we study the ethical links between language and our institutional standards on the one hand, and social discourse and/or social action on the other? This might be answered by a rhetorical question: "Isn't it pointless to know how to do something, to build something for getting something done, or to teach children without having any idea about whether or not it is worth doing?" Without consideration of this point we reduce ourselves to the absurd possibility of doing that which we are able to do for the inane reason that we are able to do it. To just do something, of course, is mindlessness at its best. It is the unexamined life. But we cannot deal with this kind of mindlessness unless and until we at least bring ethics into consideration, for ethics can speak to the social worth of something. And not simply to consider ethics, but to make explicit the ethical implications in the language we use, the institutions we build and the actions we have with one another. This analysis should help us to see relationships between language and ethics as we act with others in social and natural settings.

Let us start with a definition of ethics. Ethics are those implicit and/or explicit rules that exist between and among people; that dictate the modes of conduct that are pervasive within a profession; and ethics embody the moral principles of the cultural heritage to which a society or civilization makes

reference. In addition to this definition, it is important to note that ethics when applied (in any democratic social setting) must take account of ethical parity, that is, the sharing of responsibility and political power. All actors must be accounted for in the sense that each one shares power and responsibility ...for no other reason than that he or she is human. Further, we must understand that power and responsibility should vary directly... or there can be no ethical community. This also helps us to understand that both power and powerlessness corrupt. Thus, we must work to keep power and responsibility balanced.

Next, it would be useful to look at the language components of syntax, phonology, morphology and semantics. These items of meta-language speak to order, sound, form and meaning and make up the essence of communication. These components also suggest an interesting insight into institutional standards, social discourse and action. Institutional standards speak to rules, beauty (or lack thereof), structure and goals (purposes). These same factors are operational as people act out their lives. What is interesting here is the similarity in meta-language factors and those factors we use to investigate social phenomena. Social phenomena can be studied in terms of order (syntax), beauty (phonology), form (morphology), and function and purpose (semantics). We do have a way of studying meta-language...it has been going on for years...although its study relative to pedagogy is rare. We have, on the other hand, only begun to scratch the surface in formulating an epistemology that would account for institutional standards, social discourse, and social action. This would mean, for example, that social research would address ethics or social justice as well as order or social processes. It would deal with aesthetics as well as social institutions. Social study would, thus, be incomplete without attention to all four components. As we study any social phenomenon, we would concern ourselves with principles of ethics, social processes/systems, social aesthetics and structures.

The knowledge field traversed by the social studies, should indeed, be the area where we can begin to investigate and understand language and ethics in relationship to social institutions, action and purposes. This is the pedagogical area where we can engage in a more holistic study of the human condition. Of course, we must realize that extending the area of study in this way to include epistemology ...the study of the nature, limits the validity of human knowledge... also means that we may find ourselves treating ourselves once again as objects rather than as conditions of potential (Foucault, 1970). Thus, if we are not careful we may fail to see the difference between object and subject. These objects of study, namely ourselves, will then seem as shadows devoid of human fullness. This problem of subject-object delineation is far more serious than, for example, thinking that the map <u>is</u> reality in geography, that is, not making a distinction between map and land. It suggests that human study... study of institutional standards, social discourse and social action...exists not wherever and whenever human beings are in question, but when analysis unveils to consciousness the conditions of form, meaning, beauty and purpose. And without this consciousness ethical study will not take its rightful place in education.

How can one unveil these qualities in the study of the human condition?

It is this question that points again to meta-language and human studies. We must begin to go beyond interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary study, which raises no new questions relative to the human condition, toward a construct which will address explicitly the conditions of form, meaning, beauty and purpose. This would mean a direct study of these conditions. Indeed, social education would be defined as the study of justice, beauty, form and meaning in human discourse and/or human action.

Social education, above all, should address communication; that is, the ability to speak to and understand the cultural heritage, other contemporary world citizens, and possible alternative human futures. But a serious impediment seems to block communication. That impediment, however, is not language per se, but rather the "structures of reasoning" or meta-knowledge implicit in language (Maruyama, 1974). If people remain unaware that they are using different structures of reasoning, but are only aware of the fact that they are having difficulties communicating, each party will tend to perceive the communication difficulty as resulting from the other party's being illogical, unethical, insincere, insensitive or stupid. Or, one or the other "communicator" may fall into the illusion of understanding while being unaware of his or her misunderstanding. This will lead to our saying, "I understand you, but why can't you understand me?"

What are these "structures of reasoning?"

Basically, they are meta-knowledge constructs. They are the paradigms or conceptual frameworks which we use to see and understand the world. They are the keys to our reality...the underlying structures of our thought patterns. These structures of reasoning are cultural universals in the sense that all people have meta-knowledge constructs but they are also culture specific, and sub-culture specific in the sense that we all carry our own structures of reasoning or paradigms as the basis for our communications with others. In essence, then, there are personal paradigms constructed from elements of general and specific cultural attributes. The general components or attributes include attention to ethics, aesthetics, logic, and reflective thought...the base for paradigm development... and a study of these general items can provide an understanding of our specific reasoning patterns and moral persuasions. For example, we will find a "logic" in all cultures and/or subcultures. Knowing this, we can then determine if the logic is empirical or deductive, linear or spherical, competitive or harmonistic. This information, together with direct knowledge about aesthetics, and ethics, will

allow for some insight into the philosophic thought processes being used and should, in turn, provide a means for better communications and all that that implies. This is not only important for cross-cultural communication, but for communicating across professions, disciplines, or political parties. It is at this point that language and social education can come together. For as individuals look into the structures of reasoning or paradigmatic differences that shape people's sense of reality, they will have the opportunity for more meaningful communication. For example, any psychological hypothesis would carry with it into testing questions of morality, beauty, form, and rational explanation. Another example might have us look at the way words are selected for use in newspaper headlines. Newspapers can create certain ethical, definitional and aesthetics emphases through which both writer and reader could see explicitly the "hidden curriculum" of social discourse and social action.

With these factors in mind, the academic curricular contours for a synthesis of language and social education can be drawn. First of all the rationale of the curriculum would rest upon the importance of communication, including structures of reasoning in social decision making. It would emphasize cultural perspectives of time and place, as well as the aesthetic balance of nature and culture necessary for <u>human</u> existance.

Next, the major knowledge (including skill and affect) components would include ethics, aesthetics, logic, and philosophic or reflective thinking processes. These areas of study would be introduced in kindergarten and developed throughout the K-12 sequence. These basic studies would draw substance and examples from academic disciplines; for example, history and the social sciences.* Content organizers could be developed in each grade level taking particular note of time

*It is possible to include all academic areas in this role, i.e., mathematics natural sciences, social sciences, history, literature, languages and the arts.

(past, present and future) and place (world-wide and planetary) perspectives. Skill sequences would be incorporated into all three of the content organizers and would deal with items from reading (in content areas) to social mathematics (sampling, randomness, ratio numbers, etc.).

Finally, the instructional component would emphasize both inschool and community activities. On the one hand, there would be time away from society for students to turn ideas over in their minds and to engage in such "irrelevant" topics as medieval architecture and space colonization. In this phase of instruction there would be a sort of "de-societizing of school" so students would be more free to develop time and place perspectives. On the other hand there would be opportunities for direct involvement with community people and issues both on a world wide basis and in the immediate community.

In addition to the above, there would also be opportunities for enrichment activities through linkages with institutions of higher learning as well as programs established within local communities and schools themselves. Thus, the above brief outlines argue for making explicit the human structures of reasoning and their linguistic and ethical underpinnings. This is particularly important if we see communication as fundamental to social education. The point is that these items of ethics, aesthetics, logic, and reflective thought (meta-knowledge) are like that part of the curricular iceberg below the water line, upon which the now visible curriculum rests. But, without careful and direct attention to this hidden area, academic instructional programs will continue to sink, and social education, of course, will sink with them.

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This phenomenon is easy to witness in the speech patterns (and behavior) of educators. Some of the more obvious linguistic patterns used in education are:

THE MEDICAL MODEL

Within this model, for example, reading is taught in a reading clinic, where students are diagnosed and lessons are prescribed. Is it also the case that students are perceived as patients who are sick and in need of treatment? In some institutions students are actually given drugs and are put in isolation carrels. Is this a school or a hospital?

THE FACTORY MODEL

In this model educators talk of input, output, productivity, surplus, efficiency, plant site, cost controls and products. They tend to ask questions that a factory owner raises, namely: (1) What kind of product do we want? (2) What kind of process will produce this product (and at what cost)? (3) How much of this product will be produced? (4) For whom is the product produced?

THE MILITARY MODEL

In this situation line and staff organizational charts are important. We talk of developing or reaching certain objectives; we engage in one-way communications; and we argue that policy decisions should be made from the top down. Here, objectives are clear, clearly stated and reachable. The military mindset does not look for aesthetics or quality, just results. Aesthetics, quality and even efficiency are okay, but results come first. Without victory there is nothing. Armies and navies and perhaps schools tend to waste resources when following this model. This situation is not intentional but simply comes with an over-emphasis upon results. The individual, the equipment, and the supplies are only instramental to a larger end.